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## **County plan to beautify its byways blossoms**

### **After a year, effort to plant 1,000 cherry trees is well on its way**

By Sandy Alexander  
Sun reporter

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One year after it was announced, Howard County Tourism Inc.'s Blossoms of Hope program is one-third of the way to its goal of planting 1,000 cherry trees in the county.

Since the first 20 Kwanzan cherry trees were planted along Route 108 in Centennial Park in November, individuals and businesses have stepped up to sponsor 333 trees on public land.

More than 90 cherry trees have been planted at Centennial Park, the central library in Columbia, the Elkridge library, and the county office complex and Patapsco Female Institute in Ellicott City.

The Maryland State Highway Administration has planted about 30 trees along Route 100 and has committed to planting another 250 along state roads in the county, including 125 trees to be planted along U.S. 40 this year in areas targeted by the county for revitalization.

The program is intended to beautify the county and provide a new attraction for tourists.

The annual eruption of the pink blossoms - about two weeks after the popular cherry blossoms appear in Washington each year - is intended to bring "a unique, countywide spring celebration to Howard County that could ultimately become a signature event for the state," according to remarks County Executive James N. Robey made at the annual meeting of the tourism council.

A portion of the sponsorship price of each tree goes to the Claudia Mayer Cancer Resource and Image Center at Howard County Hospital, which offers a salon and a library for cancer survivors and their families. Robey said \$13,400 has been contributed to the charity so far.

"The feedback we've gotten is that people really enjoy the drive now on Route 108," said Rachelina Bonacci, executive director of the tourism council.

"People are beginning to look for [the trees]," she said. "They compliment us for coming up with something that will be enjoyed by people hopefully forever."

Last week, Robey announced a new component to the program that invites corporate sponsors to purchase and plant the trees on their properties.

Businesses can plant and care for the trees themselves or, for a larger fee, Town Creek Nursery in Ellicott City - which is supplying all of the trees for the project - will handle the planting.

Businesses can also sponsor trees on public land the same way individuals do, for \$500 apiece.

Turf Valley Resort and Clark's Elioak Farm have committed to sponsoring trees on their properties, while General Growth Properties Inc. has offered to put cherry trees at Merriweather Post Pavilion.

The next step will be setting up a program to plant the trees in Howard County neighborhoods, Bonacci said.

The project has been "the epitome of a partnership," said county spokeswoman Victoria Goodman. Many different groups and individuals have gotten involved, she said, because "it has really captured everyone's imagination."

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For more information on Blossoms of Hope, look for the pink icon at [www.visithowardcounty.com](http://www.visithowardcounty.com).

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